

# Honoring Women of Massachusetts

**H**onoring the Contributions of Women: A Project for the Massachusetts State House is a model program that can be replicated in state capitals and municipalities across the United States. Throughout the history of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, women have contributed to our government and society. Yet, women leaders have not been recognized within the walls of the State House where residents and visitors, young and old, view an extensive collection of portraits, plaques, and statues designed to honor our forbearers—but almost all those recognized are men. According to the State House Tour Office, nearly 100,000 people visited the State House last year; and one third of them were school groups.

The first State House public art project of a woman was a statue of Anne Hutchinson, a religious heretic banned from the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1637. The statue ended up at the State House after being rejected by other locations for technical reasons, but has never been dedicated. A statue of Mary Dyer, a 17th-century martyr to freedom of conscience, was erected on the State House grounds in 1959—the last public art tribute to a woman. This statue, like Hutchinson's, was sent to the State House as a last resort due to technical difficulties with the original site. Neither

statue was originally designed or planned for the State House location.

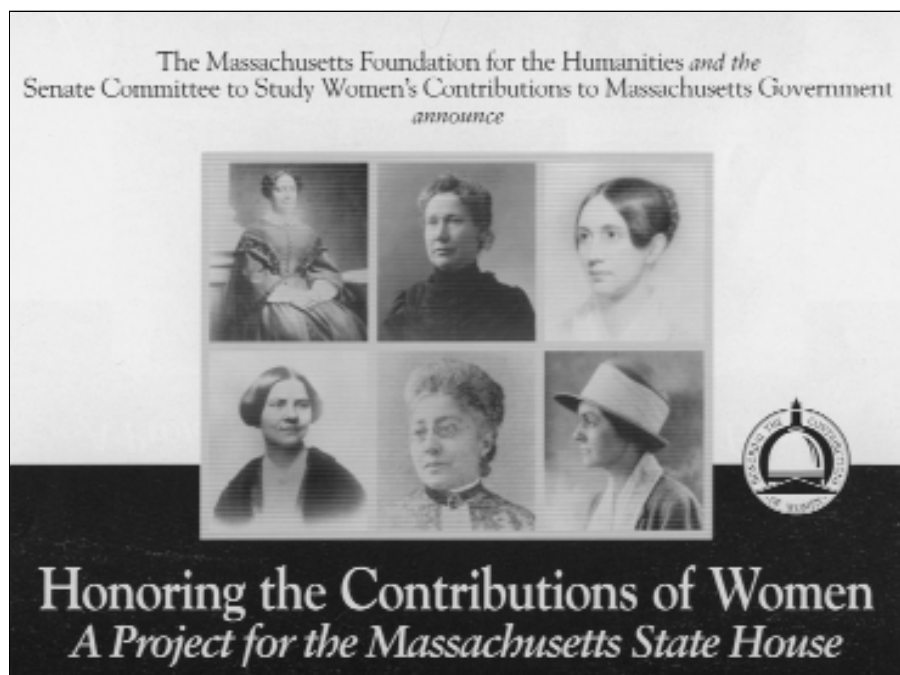
Within the State House itself, there is only one portrait of a woman—Esther Andrews of Brookline, the first woman elected to the Governor's Council in 1927. The Civil War Army Nurses Memorial in Nurses Hall, designed in 1914 as a monument to women, does not depict or identify specific nurses. Otherwise, within the State House's extensive and historic collection of hundreds of portraits, statues, plaques, and busts, there are no images of the hundreds of women who have contributed to political life and public policy in Massachusetts.

In April 1995, the Massachusetts Senate established a committee to determine how to honor the many women who have contributed to the state's political life. The committee determined criteria for candidates, nominated dozens of women, and after a year of deliberation chose to honor the following:

- Dorothea Dix (1802-1887), advocate for the mentally ill and superintendent of nurses for the Union Army during the Civil War.
- Florence Hope Luscomb (1887-1985), suffragist, peace activist, and early executive of the Massachusetts League of Women Voters.
- Mary Kenney O'Sullivan (1864-1943), union organizer and advocate of legislation protecting women and children in the workplace.
- Sarah Parker Remond (1824-1894), African-American abolitionist who led a movement to desegregate Massachusetts schools and other public institutions.
- Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin (1842-1924), founder of the Women's Era Club for African-American Women and co-founder of the National Federation of Afro-American Women.
- Lucy Stone (1818-1893), noted suffragist and editor of the Women's Journal.

Our Advisory Committee recommended recognizing the six honorees with a mural depicting all six women, to be installed in a prominent location in the State House; individual portraits of the women to be placed elsewhere in the State House; and an educational

Poster, "Honoring the Contribution of Women," developed by the Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities featuring Sarah Parker Remond, Mary Kenney O'Sullivan, Dorothea Dix, Lucy Stone, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, and Florence Hope Luscomb.



booklet which will include information about the six honorees, the other women nominated, and the historical context of their lives and work.

The Massachusetts Legislature allocated funds toward the project under the auspices of the Massachusetts Cultural Council. The Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities (MFH), affiliated with the National Endowment for the Humanities and supported by the Massachusetts Cultural Council and private sources, was asked to manage the project and to help raise matching funds. The MFH is a marvelous organization which supports a wide range of excellent public humanities programming—forums, conferences, lectures, documentaries, exhibits, history projects, and more. Every state has a humanities council which could undertake such a project.

The Foundation organized a successful kickoff event on October 22, 1996, and is now managing a campaign to raise the necessary matching funds. In December 1996, a Steering Committee was organized to oversee the project's implementation, which should take two years. The Steering Committee will convene a Public Art Selection Committee to oversee the process of defining specifications of the artwork, soliciting proposals from artists, reviewing their ideas, and choosing final

candidates to complete their work with preference given to Massachusetts artists. Simultaneously, the Foundation will develop an educational booklet by soliciting essays from noted Massachusetts historians and women's studies specialists. The Foundation will also produce an interpretive brochure as a companion to the mural to provide visitors with information about the mural's content and history. The Foundation expects to develop programs after the project's completion to keep its spirit alive.

To find out more about this project and how your state or municipality might undertake a similar project, please write or call Ellen Rothman at the Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities, 46 Temple Place, Boston, MA 02111, phone 617-451-9021.

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## Uncovering the Whole Story

Notes, continued from p. 6.

- <sup>1</sup> Congressman Bruce F. Vento, Chairman of Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands, meeting with citizens of Natchez, Mississippi, Washington DC, April 1988.
- <sup>2</sup> Gerda Lerner, *The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing Women in History* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1979).
- <sup>3</sup> John A. Hussey, "The Women of Fort Vancouver," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 92:3, Fall 1991, p. 265.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 278.
- <sup>5</sup> Tasting the past is generally available or recommended except as reconstructed in living history demonstrations. Many years ago some NPS people tried Gold Rush champagne—it didn't taste good. Personal communication, Dianne Nicholson, Golden Gate National Recreation Area, 1996.).
- <sup>6</sup> David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985).
- <sup>7</sup> Jules David Prown, "The Truth of Material Culture: History or Fiction?" in *History from Things: Essays on Material Culture*, edited by Steven Lubar and W. David Kingery (Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, DC, 1993), pp. 2-3.
- <sup>8</sup> Andrea Hinding, Ames Sheldon [Bower] and Clarke A. Chambers, eds., *Women's History Sources: A Guide to Archives and Manuscript Collections in the United States* (Bowker, New York, 1979).
- <sup>9</sup> For a good synthesis, see Sara M. Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America* (The Free Press, New York, 1989).
- <sup>10</sup> Sylvia Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur-Trade Society, 1670-1870* (University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, OK, 1980). See also John Hussey, *op cit*.
- <sup>11</sup> Linda Peaky and Ursula Smith, *Women in Waiting in the Westward Movement: Life on the Home Frontier* (University of Oklahoma Press: Norman and London, 1994).
- <sup>12</sup> See Stephen Haller, *Families at Sea: An Examination of the Rich Lore of "Lady Ships" and "Hen Frigates", circa 1850-1900* (National Maritime Museum Association, San Francisco, 1985). Haller estimates